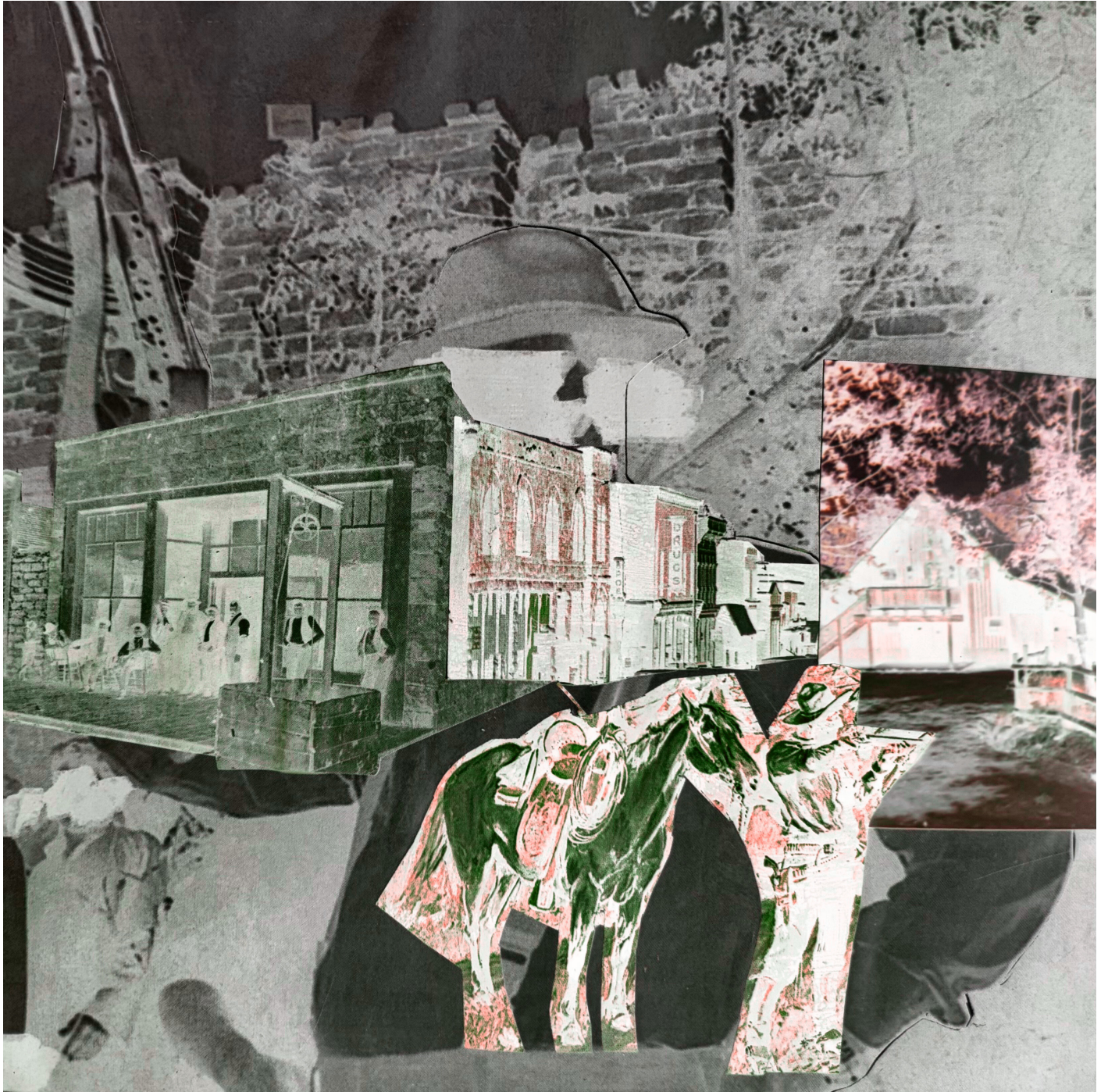


# THE WEST 4TH

Opinion. Poetry. Fiction.



JUNE 2025

# From the Editor

May 23rd, 2025

In this month's issue, we begin with Marshall Laux's piece, "Love on the Lawn," in which he covers the little music festival that Michael Gosselaar put on a few weeks ago in Fort Tryon, nestled in Washington Heights and a few rocks, pebbles, and paths away from the Cloisters. Marshall's piece is, in my opinion, a fitting way to open The West 4th's June issue. He has captured the gradual and sweet sense of open carelessness that begins to entrap all of us in the first few weeks of summer.

I think it was a tough winter for everyone. As many of us crawl our way into adulthood, the realities of the world seem to break everything we once took for granted, thought was inherent, assumed was forever. Worrying about rent. About student loans. If this degree is worth it. If it's okay to work in a pizza shop and play guitar. If she'll still like me if I have \$40 until next week. Wanting to wake up in the arms of our parents with nothing but cereal and Spongebob on our minds.

Maybe I'm just projecting. But it feels as though this is what our early 20s are made for. To be scared shitless and, at once, to be thrilled by the prospect of having to make one burrito last three days. To not know what's happening to us, to feel the tide of the world swallow us and swish us around like mouthwash. When we get spit out, where will we land?

Etc. I am so glad, therefore, to have you all as my peers. I have been truly amazed by the quality and quantity of submissions that The West 4th has received. Our readers and authors alike are so amazing, and such wonderful things have been written and said around The West 4th.

So, to put my rambling above into context: I believe that this June issue is a reflection of our age. It is restless and content, grateful for the coming season and shivering in the face of the coming years. Our writers pour their souls into these pieces, and what we are left with is an intoxicating brew of honesty, pompousness, bravado and melancholy. I can't think of a better collection of authors and readers to usher us all into this summer.

So consider becoming a part of our journey through our age, our city, our brains. If you're holding a copy of The West 4th in your hands right now, you won't be bored for the next hour or so. Promise.

For All Things Written Down and Thought Up.

Sincerely,  
Jack Kontarinis  
Editor

# our POETS and BARDS, SCRIBBLERS and SCHOLARS

ASHTON HERRES  
ALEXANDER NORTON III  
NINO MENDOZA  
AMRO IBRAHIM  
V. SEBASTIAN  
MARSHALL LAUX  
ALEX WOLF  
KATIE HUTTENMEYER  
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Cover artwork by Katie Huttenmeyer

# OPINION

## Love on the Lawn

*Marshall Laux*

In the upper reaches of Manhattan, where the subway goes from urgency to something closer to surrender, there is a park, Fort Tryon. It overlooks the Hudson, which (depending on the hour and your state of mind) can look like a river or a wound or an idea trying to remember itself. On this particular day, the weather was exactly the kind of weather you don't remember until you realize later how soft everything felt under it. There were blankets on the grass, shoes off. People drifting into position like they were receiving signals only their bodies could detect.

There was no real beginning. Music just started tentatively, unconsciously, like a thought you didn't know you were having. A nylon-string guitar. A tambourine shaken in a tempo that only half made sense. Someone humming. Maybe you.

I'd picked up a watermelon for \$2 at a roadside stand on the walk up through the neighborhood. This detail doesn't matter, except that it does because something about the hyperreal sweetness of a good watermelon on a warm day with improvised music nearby creates a synesthetic loop where taste and tone blur into each other and suddenly it's all part of the same unbroken sensory field. A kind of ambient communion. And that's the thing, this wasn't a concert and it wasn't an event. It was more like an occurrence. Something that arrived and unfolded, without climax or agenda, like fog or fatigue.

Great friends I'd met through the Music Inn, a place that technically sells instruments but in reality traffics in minor miracles and missed connections, had shown up. Other friends, friend adjacents, unknowns as well. The lines were blurry in the way that feels good, like when your vision is soft not from impairment but from awe. Some strangers passed by and then didn't. Some came closer and stayed, folding into the perimeter as if following some ancient migratory instinct.

And the music was, it's tempting to say folk, but that feels like describing the ocean as blue. It was genreless in the way dreams are genreless. It was music that didn't perform itself. It just happened, and you either tuned into its frequency or you didn't. To call it a certain energy would be true, but dishonest. It was too fragile for that word, too sacred.

There was a song at one point – I couldn't tell you the title – that sounded like forgetting. Not the traumatic kind of forgetting, but the blissful, healing kind. The kind that loosens memory like a knot and lets something older and quieter emerge. A chord change that opened like a window. A voice that didn't sing so much as it floated. And you realize, mid song, that no one is speaking, as if any accompanying sound would rupture the spell. You don't clap at fog, you don't clap at dreams.

At some point, we moved. Or the scene moved around us. The sun got lower. Shadows lengthened. The music didn't stop so much as diffuse. And then we were downtown, in Sam's studio, which is less a studio and more a psychic portal with a bed and a piano in it. We were celebrating Owen's birthday, but the celebration had already begun hours earlier and just kept echoing forward, slipping between places and contexts like reverb through cracked drywall.

It's worth noting here that Sam's building is the kind of industrial, loose-screw, bunker-like New York anomaly that seems to exist simultaneously in 1972 and 2003 and now. The kind of place where you feel like the walls have heard everything. It was while we were moving through one of those walls, up onto the third floor, I think that we heard it. A low resonance. An invitation, barely disguised as sound. The kind of noise that makes your ribcage hum in recognition before your ears catch up.

We followed it and happened upon a DIY punk show happening behind an unmarked door in the back of the hallway. A room that had no reason to exist and yet clearly had existed for some time. People inside were sweaty, vibrating, leaning against each other and the walls and the air itself. The music was loud in a way that bypasses language. You could smell the feedback. You could feel your skeleton respond to the kick drum like it was trying to remind you that you still had a body.

But again: no spectacle. No headliners. No differentiation between who was in the band and who wasn't. Just vibration. Just heat and raw presence.

There is no real difference between what happened in the park and what was happening in that room. Folk and punk are the same energy wearing different clothes. They're both ways of dissolving the line between sound and self. They're both anti-theater and they both reject arrival. They are genres that remain alongside you rather than move with something that doesn't climax because they're not trying to. That holds you in a kind of permanent state of becoming.

Which is why I think DIY music, the kind that doesn't announce itself, isn't just music. It's a way of being with other people that doesn't rely on institutions or explanations or even common language. You just show up. You sit on the grass. You open the door at the end of the hallway. You follow the sound.

And this might be the point, if there is one, that meaning isn't always the goal. That the best music, like the best moments, don't say that they are. They vibrate just under the surface of cognition, like dreams or *deja vu*. Like the lyrics to a song you can't quite make out but still understand perfectly. Like a memory you never lived but still remember.

The watermelon was real. The guitar was slightly out of tune. The music was already happening.

We were just there.

# OPINION

## Paint What You Want to See, Not What You See

Ashton Herres

Let's talk about dark art—and the effect it has on the artist during its conception.

### A RECENT PAINTING: CHAKRASAMVARA AND VAJRAVARAHI

I went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, an incredible assortment of human triumphs and tragedies. While there, I stumbled upon a little bronze statue. It stared at me.

In museums, I'll often align myself with pieces of art that move me. I'll stand in symmetry with them and exist in their presence. Usually, this ritual is powerful. I take in its message and the weight of its cultural importance gives me strength. This time, though, the relic made me feel like I was going to fall over. Chills crawled up and down my back as I processed the form. It towered over me despite being the size of my palm.

A male figure stood upon two lesser bodies while hoisting a nude female—shiny bronze, carved in the 1400s. Its peacock arrangement of arms lured me in. I felt like I was facing judgment from an ancient god that had been defamed. I've always been suspicious that the gods of old wouldn't take kindly to our new silicon-veined idol.

Now I needed its forgiveness. I had to tell its message.

### TECH AS A THIRD PARENT

I have an intense skepticism toward technology. And no, I'm not just a nostalgic Luddite who wants to be a 90s teen.

Technology was like a third parent to me. Or a bad-influence cousin. I was raised with it. I watched it grow alongside me. I had fun in the digital worlds of my youth, spent summer weeks tiring my thumb scrolling.

There are good and bad aspects to tech as an advancement. But during my dance with that deity, I learned something darker—the encroaching force of techno-capital is beginning to erode the very fabric of the religions and traditions that shape our species, culturally and physically.

### THE PAINTING PROCESS

I spent days pushing and pulling dull yellows. Sometimes fatigue would grip me. Some sections demanded more ferocity.

Each day spent on this piece painted progressively darker circles under my eyes. I started to see the world as I was painting it—corrupt, degrading, sick. And it made me sick.

Just after completing the image, I fell into a week-long, feverish illness—one of the worst sicknesses I've experienced in my life.

If I were trying to entertain, I'd say the ancient figure cursed me to bear its message and I got sick from the weight. But I'm a material rationalist at my core. This piece—and its subject—represent deeply embedded webs of meaning, history, pain. Contexts that are painful to look at.

I painted the world exactly how I saw it, in all its sickness and darkness—and I was left feeling dark and sick. No surprises.

### CULTURAL DISTANCE AND REAL-WORLD FEEDBACK

I did feel concerned that I might not have a place in artistically portraying a figure so far from my culture and background. I found the form in the Asia Wing of the Met, after all. I'm not Asian. I have no formal connection to Tibetan Buddhism.

Still, I decided to let society decide my fate—and not by asking Reddit or TikTok if they think drawing a Buddhist figure covered in wires is cultural appropriation or whatever.

I wanted real-world feedback.

So, on the first 70-degree day of the spring in NYC, I took the piece to a very busy Washington Square Park.

I probably interacted with 100 people that day. About 50% of them were Indian tourists—and they had nothing but kind things to say about the piece. They weren't just flattered that a Westerner was taking the time to depict a figure from their myths—they were also genuinely interested in the tech symbolism. Many struck up enthusiastic conversations about the work.

### A MESSAGE TO ARTISTS

If I had to leave you with something, it would be this:

*Listen to your intuition when it comes to making powerful pieces.*

Even if the piece chews off a part of your soul in the process—see it through.

That said, I won't be painting the world exactly as I see it for a while.

Instead, I'll paint the world the way I want it to be.

# COLUMNS

## Freedom of Resilience

*Nino Mendoza AKA #JettStarrNYC*

Every night as I make my way back to rented sanctuary, I see the torch that I must hold with willpower, and hope that will lead to a life of independent freedom. Freedom to universally grow, maintaining my music and art.

Flow, grow and process. Vigilance is so vital along the way.

Now that I'm given the opportunity to work and give back to the people that matter most, it's inevitable to become a living example of everything that happens in life. I am where I'm supposed to be, from yesterday to today. Nothing happens in the spirit world by accident or mistake.

This phase of resilience wouldn't have happened if it weren't for the pivotal hand of New York City, and if it weren't for humility, faith, confidence and spirituality.

This is how the Statue of Liberty means to me.

Peace, I am not dead. I have awakened from the dreams of life. Passing through the phase of earth's decadence for higher learning and with mustered strength is a spiritual enlightenment on bouncing back that gives me mileage to share with anyone who embraces faith.

Life, like a being of many colored personalities, stains the white sheets of eternity until New York's love covers me with sleep and death tramples fear to resilience

As simplicity makes things more accessible, my wisdom is shared. There is always more to the beauty of life beyond the passion that allures thy lust.

West 4th will be a merging circle of my new spiritual enlightenment

I am ready

## Rambles

*Joseph Apuzzo*

Now I can't take what's pent up so I put pen on paper to pry open this spirit of finger bound free less thought cage case worm low level prop exchange tooth eye in opened contained mill weaving what's happened to my soul the ink has run out & the colors are gone I switch pens it's always a new pen it always runs out & the other side dead end go back to churches go back to the soils & find it empty again the ink is out I've lost my pen it can't click all the time piles up & it vanishes again what happened to our love can no one hear me I step out on blazing streets & sigh. Get it out let it out I want nothing left inside I want it out I want extinction extinguish what's to come so I can recede whence I never came with dawns of mist on mountain peaks & daguerreotypes of stern countenance & quiet days of hushed tones in grasses so gentle never dry but now concrete & laughs of hatred with transient people never fixed never inborn driving up prices killing art & artists expression disprivileged mandated scarcity never think or read just work & eat ghosts of once beatific spaces crying destitute irredeemable mistaken listen! or do, it makes no difference you might as well resign yourself for free. Can you hear me now, I know kost of the time it's rude & no one wants to listen but can you hear me now.

I recommend cannolis dinosaurs laugh & mouths ajar from puppies why can't I get fetal in public? Get down on the floor of this cafe right now & wail it out it'd be easier on my arm. Was she looking at me just now? Wondering what I write? Would jack kerouac make it now? is he the enemy? is spontaneous prose something done or done well? but it's only foreigners to the celestial among us now. Purple clad empty grins on their inevitable march to the machinery of days. Good bye! I wish smoking wasn't bad for you. or that I didn't know it was bad for me. Same with wine I'd drink it all the time. Curly haired boys all over the place.

# COLUMNS

## California, Here We Go

*Brett Koppelman*

After living in four different states in my life and visiting tens of countries, I can confidently say there is no other place that is further separated from the reality of the rest of the world than the San Francisco Bay Area. I have lived here for two years now and I work in tech as a software engineer, which is a sentence one in three people you meet in the “Bay Area” will say within minutes of meeting you.

I grew up in the suburbs of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. When I tell people where I’m from, it’s usually met with confused looks, a touch of pity, and questions about cheese. I have been asked if I grew up on a farm on four different occasions. As with anyone, the place you grow up feels like the center of the world. When you’re in a new place, it’s comforting when others have even the slightest sense of what that place is like — but I rarely run into that. That is not to say that I am upset or surprised when people are unfamiliar with it. Wisconsin is, in the grand scheme of things, a relatively irrelevant state with little going for it. The weather is miserable 70% of the year, it is the state with the highest concentration of alcoholics, and the locals are far from worldly scholars. Still, it is a place that is grounded in reality, and there is a beauty and camaraderie that develops in the shared misery of enduring the weather, the boredom, and the smallness of it all.

That is not a sense I get in San Francisco. When I run into Sloane and Preston at the Whole Foods, and they tell tales of their month spent summering in Tahoe, give a glimpse into their ongoing debate on whether or not to move to Mill Valley or Greenbrae, and casually mention their Triathlon training in Marin, it is difficult to know whether or not they are doing a bit.

Yet, even with how easy it is to sneeze at all the nonsense and absurd wealth here, I understand it, and I don’t want to leave. It is one of the most beautiful places I have been. California in general is the most beautiful place, probably on the planet, where society still functions at a high level.

Why would I want to move anywhere else?

Why would I want to switch careers when I left college and am able to afford to live alone by doing stimulating work that is never repetitive.

Who really gives a fuck about seasons? Snow sucks.

Now, is anyone really asking me to leave or arguing against my points? No, not really. This is more so an imaginary argument I draw up myself in case they ever do, as most sane people would. Nevertheless, I hope my future kids grow up to be as out of touch as Bay Area natives — because being out of touch means you’re lucky.

## Poise

*Alexander Norton III*

Have you noticed as you walk down the streets of New York that something seems messed up with people? Slouching and limping. The way some slowly drift to the left or right. Or those who take up 8 feet of sidewalk space with a conversation partner. Or even the “walking dead” harassing people at the subway stations. And don’t forget the tourists who stop in the middle of the sidewalk and block the way of everyone else around them.

The streets here—a cacophony of people stumbling around in differing directions—are a window into the journey of life.

When some jerk on a bike is riding on the sidewalk opposite you, do you freeze, or do you act? You move to the side and let the guy do his own thing while you do yours. There are more important things to do.

Despite the many people who tend to aimlessly meander, the few move with intention. They know where they’re going. A rare thing. They effortlessly weave through the crowd and don’t throw roadblocks in the way of others. They’re direct and self-contained, and maybe not the friendliest. But they’re responsible; they maintain their poise.

Poise (as defined by Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary) is an easy self-possessed assurance of manner; or a gracious tact in coping or handling. Think of Ned Stark from Game of Thrones or Harvey Specter from Suits. You think Harvey Specter would be shuffling his feet, looking like a lost puppy on the streets of New York? Never. Harvey is a man on a mission; he’d be power walking with Mike to his next meeting, ready to close a deal.

Poise means one is intentional about how one moves but also encompasses the reason why someone moves. Why would you stand up from a seated position? Maybe it’s to get a glass of water, or stretch your legs, or cook some food. There can be a multitude of reasons to stand up, but any one of them would do. Expand this concept to the outside world. Why would you leave your apartment? To go to work, hang out with friends, or even run outside. You can go further and ask why you would run outside. Maybe you value health and today is cardio day, or maybe you value a relationship and run with a partner. There is a purpose to any movement, but there’s always a reason for it.

By knowing the reason why you do something, you can move through life with poise, surmounting any challenges without sweating the small stuff. You don’t get caught in inertia—arbitrary rules that cause paralysis when it comes to how you live your life and what you aim to achieve.

A coach at McGill told me to drop the word “should” from any question about life. Do what you want instead of what you feel obligated to do. If you’re going to a show last minute and your outfit is “too casual,” who cares? If you want to teach fifth graders instead of working a high-strung finance job, who cares? If you want to pack your bags and move abroad to help the disadvantaged, who cares? Just do it with poise. And own it.

# POETRY

## Architectural Digest

*By V. Sebastian*

I think I'm gonna spend some time  
looking at lakes and looking at the sky.

Celebrate the state of the ride  
while ignoring all the curves in the road past my  
headlights.

Gas tank getting light,  
playlist started over and we need to get a bite –  
but honestly, that's alright.

Make time for pit stops,  
rock a dead wristwatch.

Say that you'll go for it,  
or just get over it.  
Don't wait for them to help –  
you should just help yourself.

I don't ever think  
that people mean  
to get the way  
that they're afraid to.

My heart is set on you.  
I'll always try for you.

We might never get the apartment  
from Architect's Digest on YouTube,  
but until we do,  
I'm proud of what we do.

Think about day-to-day life –  
this shit goes by too quick  
to let it turn to strife.

Take a walk by myself,  
see a show by myself,  
but always come back home  
to feel the best  
and rest with you.

Bitter days, I bid farewell.  
Let's leave them back on the shelf  
and never let them take away  
from being who we're meant to.

I told myself I could fly,  
while other people crawl to get by.

I don't ever think  
that people mean  
to get the way  
that they're afraid to.

My heart is set on you.  
I'll always try for you.

We might never get the apartment  
from Architect's Digest on YouTube,  
but until we do,  
I'm proud of what we do.

## Saccharine

*By Marshall Laux*

the watermelon hemorrhaged sugar  
down our wrists, red grin wide like a chapel  
built from ambient sins  
we were inside the kick drum.  
inside the sweat.  
inside the Nothing  
that means Everything.  
no stage. no plan.  
only heat. only breath.  
only the knowin

## It's Not Funny, It's Not Funny Boy

*By Parker Otto*

Ramblin' Round the train station late at night  
Garbage cans talk funny so I taker on a fight  
Hiss at paperback covers that are such a blight  
While I keep myself shaded from the morning light  
Take kerosene and a match to strike  
Burn this place up while the time is right

Don't give me no pity, Don't give me no joy  
I ain't your pastime, not your wind-up toy  
Don't be laughing at me before I destroy  
It's not funny, It's not funny boy

Hop on a train, looks like a Corvette  
Stare at the pole that mocks me a mess  
While I scar my skin with fresh cigarettes  
And lick all the seats, brow thick with sweat  
The passengers make wagers and place bets  
On which one I'll kill, drink blood from their neck

Don't give me no pity, Don't give me no joy  
I ain't your pastime, not your wind-up toy  
Don't be laughing at me before I destroy  
It's not funny, It's not funny boy

Been booted off the car. Soaked like a hog  
While I howl at the moon like a thrice wounded dog  
My eyes are bloodshot, can't see in the fog  
As I stare at tiles and outrun the mob  
Do you know how I can stop the ringing in this talk?  
Or how I can take all these pills to get to Montauk?

Don't give me no pity, Don't give me no joy  
I ain't your pastime, not your wind-up toy  
Don't be laughing at me before I destroy  
It's not funny, It's not funny boy

Look like a vagabond, I screech like a bird  
While I keep on a-groovin', sniffin' after skirts  
You say I am a madman, I guess that's the word  
But wackos have feelings or haven't you heard?  
Playing with matches gets you all burnt  
It's just as soon drown when it's my turn

Don't give me no pity, Don't give me no joy  
I ain't your pastime, not your wind-up toy  
Don't be laughing at me before I destroy  
It's not funny, It's not funny boy

## Untitled

*By Keyron*

There were the birds, the  
Sultans and the Kings. And  
then i woke up in my bed

# POETRY

## Conversations With The Gods

### We've Killed

*By Alex Wolf*

We sit, unmoving, until the fire eats itself whole,  
We eat our fruit with the skin on.  
Nostalgia clenched between our teeth,  
Asking about mothers and such creatures,  
Asking about the blood on our hands.  
(Afraid—saying nothing)  
Holding close these wretched sleeps which haunt our  
daylights,  
Rotting on the kitchen counter,  
And then I touch you, and it is so gentle.  
My love, the past is coming up once more, i let myself cry  
last week and it punched my knuckles bloody,  
My body bears the mark of everything I once swallowed.  
Sweet god who never picks up the phone,  
we beg for daydream consistency,  
for release,  
This was supposed to be something about love—now I  
think it's how I kill you.  
Every line, an apology for picking up the pen, despite.  
Despite.  
Nevertheless, I ask with unapology and reem,  
I am tired of peace, I tell you.  
I am ready for joy.

### Miracle Pile

*By Maxwell Quinn*

It's really incredible how many things a person can recall.  
How many things are just sitting there dormant in our  
heads. Where do they sit, these piles and piles of  
information?  
And when you look out at this room with all of us here, just  
think about how much stuff is lying under these carpets,  
this immensely mysterious pool which seems to have no  
size; but where is it? I know it exists but what the fuck is it  
made of?

## THE BODY AS A STRANGER, UNDRRESSING IN YOUR BEDROOM

*By Alex Wolf*

I'm aching at the seams, Mama;  
Some unknown sin of uncovering—I'm not so holy when I  
take full breaths, now, am I?  
Quiet the poets now, sweet one,  
I'm a man of majesty,  
I'll eat your god and my own alike—  
I'll go back to the garden,  
Rewrite history,  
Become Adam, this time.  
In dreams, we swim like true believers,  
Oh—  
Flood me, Mother, please—  
Before the stage falls to black.

## Drinks

*By Maxwell Quinn and Ridoy Majumdar*

Drink up.  
This tastes like acid. That tastes like shit.  
Ow. Ouch.  
That one burns. Do you guys fuck with grapefruit?  
And why did you make me drink that?  
I can't believe you invited me here.  
And who are those clowns watching us?  
They look like clowns.  
They look like they don't like us.  
People don't look at you that way when they like you.  
Is it because of what I'm drinking?  
Do they not like white claw?  
I wonder if they like grapefruit.

## I've Got Snacks

*By Ridoy Majumdar*

Something smells quite right here  
And quells the fright I some nights fear  
Could it be a treat? Of the tasty kind?  
That tempts me with a scent so divine?

When I find the hunger attacks,  
I'll be okay, cuz I've got snacks.  
Snacks I do not lack.  
Meals are for the fools and hacks.

I'll buy the store, I'll pay the tax.  
I'll walk out holding sacks and sacks.  
What are they full of? Snacks.  
Packs of snacks, racks and stacks of snacks.

If you find me blind from cataracts,  
My hearing reduced to a silent track,  
If my faculties cave and senses lapse,  
I'll be relaxed. Cuz I've got snacks.

When dark deafening thunderstorms crack,  
And hard howling winds rush me back,  
If you find me alone in a decrepit shack,  
I'll be relaxed. Cuz I've got snacks.  
Snacks to the max.

But I digress - so returns the attack:  
Meals are whack.  
Meals are for the fools and hacks.  
Meals deserve the most flack.

Dogs bark, ducks quack, and I snack.  
For snacks I am a maniac.  
I've got packs and racks and stacks and sacks full of  
snacks to the max.

# POETRY

## My Room

By Amro Ibrahim

My room is closed  
4 walls  
They're all my friends  
They also don't judge me;  
Weird friends

People don't get in  
I don't get out  
We stay up late together  
They don't leave me  
I'm free to go whenever I want

It knows everything about me  
I've been here for most of its life  
I can tell it of my travels outside  
They, the blissful listener  
It knows my dents and divots  
I know its cracks and crevices

Cream colored roof  
Sea green walls  
Eyeballs in hollows  
Nerves yanking electrical signals  
What does this all mean  
Is space what exploits our differences?  
Is difference in matter what matters in  
the grand scheme?

I brought someone over  
They barfed on the walls  
A new color to add to their lexicon  
It's getting off, but not without leaving  
a mark  
What makes that  
She said she had pizza for dinner  
Pizza doesn't look like that  
What is that  
Maybe she had a salad  
Spinach salad  
Spinach is that shade of green  
She can't tell me what else she had  
I kind of have to know now  
Every glance makes me wonder every  
time

Another night crawls by in my room  
Though dispersed, the smell perseveres  
in my brain  
The recall of the last 24 hours cleaning it  
What did I do two days before  
I can't remember  
Maybe it knows  
I can't speak to it  
This is a trick  
Cosmically imposed

Movies are my pleasure  
Late nights are chased away by the  
sweet gruesome plots of thrillers  
Screams of night are the only true way  
to spend it  
It's been watching with me  
Maybe it gets me

I take a swig of my gallon jug on my  
bedside  
I can't pay rent  
I look at the walls for guidance  
I wish this was the giving tree  
Synthetic plaster probably doesn't  
have a soul  
I can't imagine that though  
So much time has passed that some  
remnant of mine has been transfused  
Osmosis

I probably shouldn't turn on the  
lights  
I can't see without them, guess I'll cave  
If you can't pay rent you don't need to  
pay electricity  
I hear an inching in my room  
I look  
It seems wrong  
The shape's wrong  
Was the room this small?  
Smaller than the pettiness of this  
room could imprint on me

I'm out trying to get money  
The constants: death rent and taxes  
Hopefully one gets me at some point  
so I don't have to submit to the others  
I'm joking of course  
A joke with a modicum of truth  
I don't want to die, I just want release  
from this world

Math isn't my strong suit  
Not many things are  
I just make more money than I  
thought I could  
It's obviously not enough though  
I'm here for another month  
My revised math tells me I just saved  
another month

I pay a lot of rent because I've cared  
about this apartment since I've been  
around the city  
Since I was a child  
I inherited it from my parents  
The landlord caught on and raised  
the rent  
I don't think he can do that  
I'm weak  
I'm in the middle of cleaning it  
I'm in the kitchen getting floor  
cleaner  
I hear furniture getting moved  
I investigate  
I'm the single soul who lives here  
Door open and the layout looks  
relatively the same  
The daylight cramps the room  
I like it better dark  
Dark and clean

The blanket of night is released  
It's allowed to flow on this resistant city  
From above it looks like this blanket is a  
well known buffet for moths  
And the light is never fully covered  
I can't seem to sleep  
I guess I didn't try hard enough (or I didn't  
not try hard enough; I was thinking too  
much?)  
I pass out nonetheless

The bed is flirting with the door  
One could kiss if they lunged a little  
forward  
This is bad news  
My room is shrinking  
No  
It's shrunk so much that I can't think about  
what happened  
I've decided to stay in my bed for the day  
Perhaps that can stop it  
This may seem drastic, some would  
investigate what is causing it  
Ideally I'm just on drugs and hallucinating  
But I don't believe in anything but the soul  
The only impalpable thing I can feel  
I can hear the shrieks and cries now  
though  
The walls are crying for me

5 hours in, no shrinkage  
I'm hallucinating in a different way  
I see faces on the wall  
They jut out  
The crows feet are etched into their faces  
I can't help but believe they're alive  
Am I alive  
My breath is going  
Which means my heart is pumping  
Pumping through my veins so my body  
can stay alive  
Me being cognoscente of this proves my  
head is alive

8 hours in and voices make themselves  
present  
If the crying before was my soul's  
perception of them, now my eardrums can  
feel them and send signals to my brain  
The brain is doing no work aside from  
receiving here

Yesterday I marked that I needed to put  
3000 into an envelope in my mailbox  
Old school  
I couldn't do that  
The room hasn't contracted since I've been  
in here  
My stomach is grumbling  
There's just enough room between the bed  
and door for me to squeeze out  
Or can I Gandhi it?  
I swig my gallon jug of water

# POETRY

12 hours in I order door dash and have to tell them about the code I had for my spare key locked to the stairs  
I tempt them with a huge tip if they bring it to the bedroom door  
I don't have to pay rent so I basically gained that money  
a knock  
I open the door as much as it will go  
My arm reaches out and I grab the lo mein  
I have no space to eat on my desk so I eat on my bed  
I'm brave for this  
The net of caution is too wide to catch orange chicken stains  
My bed is yellow

13 hours and I'm disgusted by the smell of food  
It all just smells like barf in here  
I place the trash outside the door  
My arm sticking out  
The furniture moves  
My arm is stuck I can't feel much from the forearm down oh fuck am I fucked I should've left earlier now I can't and I'm so fuck

It's like I got eaten and they did a shitty first bite  
I guess I'm stuck like this  
In agony  
The faces jut out again  
The crows feet deeper, laugh lines also came to the party this time  
They squirm crying in agony

Can I just say, I hate this  
I wish this was a bad dream or something  
A momentary "hahaha you thought you lost everything?!?! That sucks for that time but now you should move on and take your lesson with you through the rest of your life."  
What's the lesson here?  
Leave your room and it shrinks?  
Live your life and life shits in your coffee?  
I'm good with that if you're also good with that, Room

I'm going to do the only real thing you can do when you're awake in your bed  
It feels really good  
My dick is really sensitive this time around  
You do it for a week straight and you think it's way less pleasurable but then you do it on the 8th day and it's actually bliss  
I watch too much porn  
Could this be a porn scenario?  
Maybe those jutting faces could get down and freaky  
I would just have to position my body properly and probably something fun would happen

Or maybe I'd get the toothiest head I've ever gotten  
That is to say, it's full tooth  
Teeth  
Then I'd bleed out and probably die  
Do you want that?  
I, to die, with you? Die with our relationship? Or am I going to be immortalized in your walls?  
There's only one way to find out and I can't handle that fact

The struggle with being a stay at home person is thinking of what else you could be doing  
In the mornings you think "how can I not be a piece of shit today?"  
And you do the same things you usually do and think "I guess I'm doing the opposite plan of action, accepting I'm a piece of shit until I no longer feel like one."  
Can you piece of shit so hard that it becomes normal for you? Can you piece of shit so hard that you actually are fulfilling your expectations perfectly? That it's a wave of relief when you do exactly what you did today and are able to do the things you previously wished you were able to do?  
Egotistical attachment is probably my biggest enemy right now  
The attachment that I'm the person who doesn't do what I do, I do the exact opposite though and that's probably taking away from the whole self image thing

Hour 24  
The furniture is broken, the door still has me in on its teeth  
Craziness has faded  
Sanity dawns  
The walls still hold this love for me  
A knock  
"Come in"  
The landlord  
Old, healthily robust Egyptian man  
Jokes too much  
More like jokes about things I take seriously  
Namely this apartment  
More like kicking me out  
He's not really joking  
He's manifesting  
He wants rent, I can smell it  
He can smell all 24 hours of what's happened

I may have pissed in the Dr Pepper from takeout  
I may have not pooped at all  
I think my arm is gonna get infected soon  
He wants rent  
I don't have rent  
He tells me sure I do

I tell him I don't have anything in my savings  
I got 1500 in my bank account and wasn't going to get more for over a month  
My pay cycle is weird  
"Are you sure you don't want to make a deal, habibi? Pay a little interest? I know how much this place means to you."  
Cant make a deal with the devil if you're already in hell  
"What are you doing back there? Get out if you can't pay rent."  
"I can't, don't call 911 I have to stay here"  
I might die soon  
That's probably fine

Firefighters break the door open  
They bust the bedroom door down and try to take care of me  
The room doesn't like them doing this  
They are consumed  
How?  
Absorption  
Long and agonizing absorption  
They were gone in 5 minutes  
Into the walls they went  
Not exactly long, but long for having to agonize the whole time  
Forget your life flashing before you in a moment  
Facing your mortality in 5 minutes is really heart stopping  
I can't laugh at that joke  
It's too real  
I'm going to die here

I offered myself up on a silver platter  
Took off my clothes  
Maybe that makes it easier for the walls to consume me  
I step outside the door frame and the walls giggle  
I see them closing in  
I step back as they are just big enough to fit me  
A wash of black

I can't see anything  
Just black  
It's funny that these walls used to be sea green  
Now everything around me is black  
I can't conceive of how I'm processing all of this  
Is my consciousness real?  
If I'm asking this question then it is  
I am thinking therefore I am  
The wall is sweet to me  
It's digesting me slowly, letting me take my time  
It smells like vomit  
I am not content, nor did I ever think I would be

I am though

# Here There Be Serpents

By C. E. Foster

The hill remains. Perhaps it will always be there, with its proud peak a permanent reminder of a time long gone, surrounded by people who would rather soon forget. You can't see the top from the ditch, constructed with ancient spades and clawing hands. It sits shrouded in its own mystery, defended by a booming presence that calls down to the onlooker, do not approach, for ye are unwelcome. It looms. Perhaps the hill will always be there. I became hopeful as industry approached the region from across the sea that it would be discarded as just another heathen monument and built over, but I now fear that others know it is not to be touched.

I had thought sitting near the edge of the ferry boat and staring off at the land of my birth would be a refreshing, thrilling experience. Where there were several hundred ferries a week heading East to Liverpool, there were only one or two heading West, often occupied by fishermen eager to poach the Irish sea from the other coast or the occasional family bundled in their last wool blanket returning home from another failed attempt at a different life. My own boat, heading out of port on a brisk Sunday afternoon in October, carried such a group. The family's father had a thin black coating in the lines of his face, his lips curled up into his mouth around the words he could not say. The mother wept silently with her skirts and arms gathered around the child between them. He was as tiny as a doll I'd once seen a girl carrying around Williamson Square, but rattier and dressed in what appeared to be the remnants of a flour sack stitched together with linen and muslin as trousers. I looked away and out at the stretch of sea before me, pushing away the thought of how easily that could have been me. I was returning of my own volition—something that made the dock attendants at both Liverpool and Dublin look up at me suspiciously from under their heavy hats.

My mother had finally agreed to host me in my childhood home after nearly twenty years of being away. The moment I received and read the letter with her familiar script and concessive words a month before my departure, I beckoned Warren into my personal study and bade him read it too. I watched his eyes gradually light up behind his turtle-shell pince-nez.

"Niamh, she's said yes?" He asked in his terribly distinct Birmingham accent.

"Yes, I know." I laughed. He set the letter down on the desk and took me up from the chair, embracing me in his wrinkled white shirtsleeves. He had always been insistent on meeting my mother, a sort of equivalent exchange for me meeting his—only once at our quiet wedding, where I distinctly remembered Mrs. Greywold pulling Warren aside before taking his vows and whispering something about his "dirty bog-trodder bride" and how it was "not too late." I had since feigned ill or planned an outing during the times he visited his parents, but eventually he caught on. We had an understanding.

"I think it's better I go alone," I said, much to his dismay. "Since the famine she's been—unstable, from what I know. Besides, it's not the city. Those boys in Kildare'll pan you out."

It took a day or two of convincing but he eventually conceded. He would leave Liverpool and go to Birmingham to visit his Greywolds, and I would travel to Kilcullen by way of the Dublin ferry to see my mother. A solo outing wasn't unheard of at the time, but as I approached the docks in my travel dress and hair cover without someone to hold my bag, I was suddenly a white feather in a crow's tail. It wasn't an irregular feeling.

The water on the Irish sea greeted me heartily by spraying salt in my eyes as I gazed out towards the country I'd left all that time ago. My mother and father had just enough money to send me across alone during the famine, leaving themselves at the mercy of whatever resources were left. While I lived as a maidservant in an estate outside the city, playing down my accent and polishing silver for meals, my mother watched in helpless rage as my father gave the last of the bread and cheese to her and expired on the front step. From what I heard, she kept the body for three days before alerting anyone nearby—his 'spirit' hadn't left her yet, she claimed in a letter to me. I thought to myself that perhaps she had some of that old heathen blood in her. It was with this memory in mind that the boat docked in Dublin, and I shuffled off onto the platform, rubbing my sore eyes. I felt nothing sentimental for the town. Its grey sky and stone buildings were no different from the other side of the sea—this was not my Ireland.

A few hours into the coach ride from Dublin to Kilcullen, I began to feel something grow in my chest. The streets became narrow, covered in rough gravel and thick weeds crunching under the lumbering draft horses' feet. The driver had said nothing to me after asking my destination and only muttered sweet Irish words to the horse. I recognized most of them, remembering how my grandmother used to whisper similar things to me as I fell asleep in her lap. *Mo stór*, she would say. *Is tu a stór mo chroí*. At that moment, for the life of me, I could not remember what it meant.

Driving through the Curragh, the sun began to set. The road's impurities began to hurt each time they jolted the coach—a feeling that returned more familiar than slipping on a bodice, even though the last time my body was carried over that stretch of land, I was thirteen years old, turned around on the back of a donkey cart to face the disappearing image of my parents weeping and waving. *I left in a linen frock with fraying wool stockings*, I thought. *Now I return in four layers of silk, cotton, and lace*. Though they didn't make the road bumps any easier to brace for. The coach slowed to a halt for a moment, and in the near-darkness I wheeled my neck around in hopes I had reached my home. "Caoirigh," the driver called. That one I knew—sheep. I heard their small hooves tread lightly over the ground before the calm draft horse, barely blinking an eye.

Their damp wool carried a particular aroma that clung to all of their products—the woody, pungent smell in its purest form that one doesn't soon forget. I turned to the other side of the coach searching for their shepherd, but saw no one. Just a drove of brown and white fleece huddled together in a single mass moving across the road. I smiled and inhaled their scent.

My mother's cottage sat behind Old Kilcullen, where the ruins of the old church and the roundtower loomed silently over the slope. I gripped the handrails of the coach to keep from sliding forward as we descended. I remembered running up this hill a thousand times as a child, grabbing up my skirts and sliding through the dirt with my leather soles, feeling my thighs burn with exhaustion. It was the only way to leave out property, which always made me feel as if we were protected on all sides from anyone or anything that tried to scale it. It had become more difficult shortly before I left.

The coach driver whistled a pattern and the horse stopped. We had arrived. He opened the coach door and helped me out onto the dirt path with my bag seemingly in a rush before quickly jumping back into the driver's seat and clicking the horse forward. We exchanged no words, and before I could thank him, he had disappeared over the incline.

"Niamh?" a timid voice from inside the house called. I turned towards it, seeing each window dimly illuminated with a small oil lamp in the near darkness. There was shuffling behind the chipped wooden door. "Niamh, is that you?"

"Yes, mam." I called, feeling excitement and terror well up in my chest. Nearly twenty years, the death of her husband, decades of isolation, only letter correspondence with her only daughter. I had no idea who this woman would be. My last image of her had been a pale, willow switch of a woman shaking in the knees with deep-set eyes and chestnut hair, prematurely graying.

The door opened with a struggle, creaking on its hinges and dwarfing the figure that stepped out. I recognized her as my mother, to be sure, but only at first because of the way she styled her hair. As the Victorian styles penetrated our coast in the mid forties, she had begun to roll her hair, already naturally coiled, in small iron cylinders she rested in the cooking fire nightly. With her farm apron on and her hands covered in the earth's clay from planting cabbages beside the house, she looked to me like an actress not yet in costume. The streaked gray to her hair had now become a shock of white, yet it still sat in a twist of curls at the nape of her neck. She smiled when she saw me, a wrinkled, dry smile of browning teeth, but a genuine one nonetheless. Her eyes were china plates half sunk into a peat bog. "My love," she whispered, walking gingerly towards me to gauge my reaction. I smiled, dropping my bag off to one side and embracing her. "Hi, mammy." I said into her neck. She smelled of wood fire with a hint of something sweet, possibly a primrose. After three or four minutes of embrace and silence, she pulled back and put her hands on my shoulders, examining my face and body. She placed a bony hand on my

cheek, pushing a bit as if to feel its thickness. I saw her eyes glisten for a moment, then she nodded and grabbed my hand, beckoning me inside.

Not much had changed about the cottage—the walls were stone on the inside, covered with hanging idols and crosses as well as cross-stitched prayers. The windows were high, only accessible if one reached up to open them, and the staircase leading to the second level was lit on the wall by three oil lamps in metal cages. Two crudely carved rocking chairs sat swaying by the fire, which hosted an iron vessel suspended on a hook. Steam escaped it on all sides, pushing out the aroma of seasoned chicken and chives. I suppose something had changed.

My mother took my large carpet bag in her hands, heaving it up to her chest and setting it delicately on the first stair. Her knees did not shake, but seemed to lock under the weight of my belongings. Smoothing her dress, she walked back over and ushered me into one of the rocking chairs before scurrying over to the bench and producing a thick mug of tea to place into my hands without a word. She gathered one for herself, then sat down beside me in eager silence.

"So," she began, tapping her mug with her nail. "Your husband, is he...?"

"He's visiting his own family this week," I said. She nodded with understanding.

"Is he a good lad, Niamh?" she leaned forward. "Tell me, is he good to ya?"

I laughed a bit at the question. "Mammy, you know he is. You know how we are."

She smiled lightly, nodding again. She knew very well that our marriage had been out of convenience. Warren wanted an excuse to leave his family for his own pursuits, and I wanted more than the maidservant job at his aunt's estate up in North England. Each time he visited, he would seek me out and ask me about my life and work. I found him intruding at first, but eventually warmed up to his advances. They were by no means romantic, but after I understood his approach, I decided to concede. An Irish maid was the perfect bride for ostracization in a middle-class English society, and by that time he had the necessary means to make his own independent money. We'd feigned a love marriage. He eventually became a magistrate, and I pursued literature in my own time. I never minded his eyes lingering on women in the street nor his late returns, and he found no fault in my walking along a back avenue to gaze at the ladies of the night. We were as affectionate as we felt necessary.

"That's grand, like." my mother continued, shifting her weight in the chair. "I tell ya, ya'd never a found such a fella in this county. Ya remember James Carey, live up by Newbridge? Now tha's a fella ya'd like ta forget. Jus bout a week ago he come out the pub near Luí, banjaxed as bullfrog, swingin' all about till he clobbers up thon Dara O'Suilleabháin jus tryna walk home—"

For the next two or three hours, my mother did not stop speaking, detailing the town gossip to me as if I'd only left days ago. She told me which of the families in the area had

survived the famine, who hadn't, who left, who stayed, which sons had taken over their fathers' businesses, and whose daughters had married them. She became far more animated as she spoke, even before she revealed a bottle of sherry she had been keeping for occasion. We drank out sherry and ate our dinner, during which I noticed she still ate in tiny bites as if it were the last thing she had. Some point close to midnight, she stopped her gossip and turned to me, eyes wide and serious.

"Niamh, I've gotta tell ya," she placed her hand on my knee. "This town, it's not what it used to be. Things have changed."

I furrowed my brow. "Yes, I know, mammy," I started. "I know the famine changed everyth—"

"No." she said in a whisper, cutting me off. "The land is..." she searched for the words. "People have been hearing things."

"What?"

"Hearing things, at night. They say they can hear the banshees screaming." her face paled.

"Banshees, huh." I almost laughed.

"Up by Cnoc Ailinne. They'll hear them, calling for them. For their páistí. Old Minnie Tyrel down the road threw 'erself from 'er top window for not bein' able to take it anymore." There was no give in her expression. Her fingers now gripped my leg tightly. *Cnoc Ailinne? Where we used to pray?* I thought.

"And do you hear them, mammy?" I asked.

"Every night before dawn." she said with a firm resolve. "Everyone's been sayin' that they've come for the ones who weren't supposed ta make it."

"What do you mean?" She shook her head slowly, ignoring my question.

"People smell things, too." she continued. "Fires where they aren't. Meat roasting, burning. Ruairi MacIannan once swore he could smell blood, clear as day. And ya know what that man's been through, he'd know." I looked away from her and into the fire. *When did it get this bad with her?* I thought.

She suddenly stood up out of her chair, knocking her sherry cup to the side as she knelt before me and reached up to grab my shoulders, eyes wild. "Do not tread 'pon Cnoc Ailinne." she commanded, shaking me a bit like a child she was disciplining. "It isn't safe. You don't know." I nodded in confusion, and she shook me again. "Stay away from that Dún." I was a woman grown, but her command made my stomach drop and my senses beg to obey. I stared into her eyes, my face growing cold. I nodded vigorously, and she collapsed into my arms, tears welling her in eyes. She had always loved the sherry.

As the wee hours crept on and I lay in the tiny, oak bed from my childhood, I listened. The banshees were just folk tales our parents had told us as children to be afraid of the strong winds that signal a storm. When the wind picked up, my mother would call to me across the field, *come back now, Niamh, or the banshees'll get ya, like!* I always imagined them as women, meters and meters tall with white hair over their faces and no shoes, screaming down from the clouds and reaching their hands through to greedily snatch up little disobedient children. I then wondered about my mother—

isolated in this cottage for twenty years. She said people came to visit, telling her things and bringing her food, but from what I understood, she was almost entirely alone. I pictured her in one of the rocking chairs before the fire, her hand on the arm rest of the other, smiling through bitter tears. My own eyes began to water, forgetting why I was still awake, and I shortly drifted off to the sounds of wind through the thistles.

## Fear Backwards

By M. E. Link

Though I felt as chaste and sexless as a monk there on the bare ground by the bonfire, I could do nothing but sink into the heat of the body next to me. That body belonged to Rodra, who I'd met mere moments ago upon my arrival to this jovial bash. It was All Hallow's Eve, a most sacred occasion upon which I was invited to congregate by fireside to commune with otherworldly spirits. The biting air of autumn had driven us quickly into each other's orbit to keep warm. We now sat in a tangle of legs, my head almost entirely resting on his shoulder.

« What's your name? » Rodra asked me.

« Ruze, » I replied. My lips were stained black. My torso was clad in a US military Ike jacket from the 1950s. And, my shoulders were overshadowed by a sizable span of feathered black wings.

Rodra marveled at my getup, wondering, « What are you—a fallen soldier? »

I grinned as I considered the thought, and then shrugged. « I could be. Or, what if I'm a simple magpie? »

Low and sincere, a handsome fellow named Hudson gentled the strings of a shabby guitar. He began to croon a mournful tune.

*Sometimes I don't know where this dirty road is takin' me  
Sometimes I don't even know the reason why  
But I guess I keep a-gamblin'  
Lots-a-booze and lots-a-ramblin'  
It's easier than just a-waitin' around to die*

"Waitin' Around to Die," Townes Van Zandt (1968)

Rodra's beard and breath so ly tickled the nape of my neck, revealing goosebumps on my flesh, as I began to formulate a set of labyrinthine ideas in somewhat mangled French.

« J'ai volé ces ailes, » I confessed impulsively.

« La baguette, hein ? » Rodra responded nonsensically.

« Ces ailes me volent, » I dared to say.

« La baguette, alors ? » He elucidated.

« J'ai les ailes qui volent, » My voice neared a whisper.

« La baguette, bien sûr ! »

Rodra clearly didn't have much fluency in French to grasp the riddles I devised, but his gutsy gonzo lines were so absurd I burst out into belly-deep laughter. Who is this being? I wondered. Who is this soul by my side, keeping me cozy on a frigid All Hallow's Eve? I took in his garb—he wore little but a sequined tunic that emitted the glow of the fire before us.

« I'm a disco ball, » he informed. I drew myself further into him as if we had never been strangers.

# Cemetery by the Bay

By Laura Gulbranson

Maeve Nova peered at her broken watch. She was never good at keeping track of time, and that hadn't changed now that she was dead. Twelve hours ago, Maeve's weightless body made impact with gritty tarmac. Maeve didn't remember much about the events between her death and getting here, wherever "here" was in the blinding mist and fog. One moment she couldn't breathe, and the next she was floating in the air, the earthly world shrouded in an opaque cast as she freefallen into a yawning chasm.

Looking up from her watch with a wary gaze, Maeve squinted at the glowing bone-shaped gates, its claws for an entrance as fog permeated through the cracks.

Vague memories flooded her mind from twelve hours ago. Hadn't she been here before?

*White doors and whiter corridors, the cavernous walls glistening moonstone, the floors paved in quartz. Her body hovered in the air before being flung back into an invisible chair, the upholstery bone-chilling cold when her fingers pressed against the icy surface. An orb of spectral light blinded Maeve's eyes when she looked up. It shone from where the stalactites bundled at the top of the white cavern ceiling, where glowing stones glugged the cavern walls like barnacles attached to shell and coral.*

*Maeve's breath hitched in her throat when she looked ahead. Fog thinned, and beyond, a pulpit stretched across the cavern floor where nine hooded figures sat on their glittering thrones of sapphire, diamond, and gold, their onyx garments shielding their faces in prismatic moonstone light. Thin tendrils of fog swirled where their feet should have been. Maeve's eyes adjusted as she read Latin script, the archaic letters transforming into English across the pulpit. 'Limbus Conclave.'*

*So it seemed — Maeve found herself at the mercy of a council.*

Maeve blinked away her delirium and let out a groan. She didn't think the afterlife would constitute her waiting in line for an eternity. The gates wide open, Maeve wished she could turn back. The bones comprising the gates curled into themselves, the skeletal remains taking on the form of a ravenous mouth with fanged incisors, rather than the shimmering golden-laced gateway Maeve had imagined in her mind of the afterlife. Standing in line, Maeve would have much preferred to be back floating in the void. Half-conscious, as if waking from a deep slumber. She could not see her body, and any remnant of her physical form had been shrouded by the clouds she floated through twelve hours before. It was only upon landing on rocky terrain that Maeve could feel her legs, wobbly on the cratered surface of unsteady ground. She bent her knees, her fingers tracing through pebbly black sand.

Now here in line, the fog dissipated in whorls of mist, revealing a line of billowing silhouettes of newly arrived souls. They resembled a murder of crows on an endless cascade of asphalt. Far ahead the air cleared and from the thinning fog, Maeve took in the sight of rusting red cables suspended in the air as metal joined together to form a bridge. Up above, splotches of angry clouds swallowed whatever trace of sky there once had been.

Maeve turned around, not sure if she was in the right line, especially given, she was now at the very back. Standing on the tip of her toes, she eyed the queue that snaked around the bridge into the mouth of the Council's gates. Maeve was certain. She had been here before. Why was she in line again? She had already seen the Council, had waited in this very line, where time had stretched on forever. She wasn't going to wait in line again.

Maeve waded through the crowd, murmuring a string of "excuse-mes" and "thank-yous" as she moseyed her way closer to the gates. But a cacophonous howl rang in Maeve's ears when she took a step back where the two lines forked on the asphalt road. "Watch it!" a brusque voice erupted from behind. Maeve turned around, about to apologize when she paused at the man before her. "Uh, sorry?" she said sheepishly, scratching the back of her head at the man's clown costume. "I'm just trying to get through. Do you happen to know where we are? My memory evades me—" said Maeve, her voice tinny and far away as she spoke.

"We died, didn't we?" The clown said in a gruff tone, the annoyance multiplied by the frown lines melting on his forehead, where blood mixed in with fading paint.

"What happened to you?" Maeve asked the clown.

"After a hard day of 'entertaining' bratty children at a birthday party, I hit the bar. Little did I know that the Serial Killer Clown was out and about in the city," the clown grumbled.

"The Serial Killer Clown?" Maeve looked at the man's corroding makeup, at the uneven contours of his face and the tattered ends of his jester costume. The bells on his multicolored cap jangled with every erratic movement and violent shake of his head.

"I never saw the eyes of my killer," the clown continued, "just knew that after being beaten to a pulp and forced to drink chemical acid, I was a goner. Never again. When I get through those gates—" the clown pointed to Death's Gates, waving a fist in the air as if he himself could beat the gates to a pulp. "Never again, I tell ya!"

"Wait—" Maeve paused. "You know what happens when we get through those gates?"

The man let out a clownish laugh. "Of course not! I'm a clown!"

Maeve furrowed her eyebrows, not sure how that connection was relevant, but the truth dawned on her.

"I can't believe it," Maeve murmured, her heart seeming to have stopped beating like her watch. "Am I actually..." Maeve gulped. "Dead?"

The clown moved closer to her. "Really? You can't believe it?" The clown looked at Maeve incredulously. "You must be twenty? Twenty-five? Sixty? How old are ya?"

"Eighteen," Maeve said, feeling old and young at the same time. But she could care less about her age now that she was dead.

"Ehh... kids are looking older these days and getting stupid," muttered the clown under his breath before

continuing. “Just as it’s common knowledge for every kid to hate clowns, it’s common knowledge that whatever is behind those gates has somethin’ to do with the next life. And in the next life, I want a promotion! No more clown business for me! No more! I need a raise!”

Maeve shivered, ignoring the clown’s theatrics. She could see it, one kernel of truth, that didn’t take a netherworld genius to figure out. It all made sense now. Why had she been so blind? This was a repeat! Being in line all over again. These were the gates she had dreaded...

“Oh no—” Maeve let out a forlorn exhale. “I’m in the wrong place!” Maeve exclaimed, eyes scanning the crowd again. These were new faces, but the place was the same.

A cackle echoed behind her. Maeve looked over her shoulder to see a wan face with sunken eyes the color of ice peering at her. “Keep on telling yourself that. I’m in the wrong place, too!” The ghoul smiled, revealing teeth as sharp as icicles. She wailed her arms in the air, pointing to random souls in the crowd. “He is! They are! We are all in the wrong place!” The ghoul crooned hysterically.

Maeve turned back to the clown. “No. I’m *actually* in the wrong place. I’ve met the Council already! The Limbus Conclave.”

“The Limbus who?”

Maeve cursed. “Look — believe me! When you step inside those gates, you’re going to meet a group of hooded fellows called the Limbus Conclave. They are going to give you a survey that asks you questions about your last life and the next. Then, they will put you on an improvement plan and make you sign a—”

“An improvement plan? Like a promotion, ain’t it?” The clown’s eyes grew alert.

“That’s beside the point, clown!”

“Don’t talk to me if you’re going to be snappy with me! Kids these days! No respect!” The clown readjusted his jingling cap then quipped, “If you are telling the truth, what questions were on the survey? Hm? How many questions were there?”

“999.”

“999?” The clown shouted in disbelief, eyes glowing in the fog. Maeve’s memories were returning now, no longer shrouded in fog. She remembered one of the questions at least: What are the top three destinations you would like to be placed at when you are reborn again?

Maeve had named idyllic islands and warm, sandy beaches. Tulum, Bora Bora, Mykonos... not this— atop a dismal bridge with a crowd of souls queued up at Death’s gates. Maeve frowned when the clown shook her shoulder with a violent tug.

“Give me a hint. What questions did they ask ya? You might’ve screwed those questions up, but that won’t be me! Jeez, you gotta get back in the line again?” The clown cackled. “What did you do wrong on the questionnaire? You flunked it?” His stomach jiggled with every sinister guffaw, the blood on his face melding deeper into his frown lines. Maeve glared at the clown. He wasn’t helping the situation at all. But she wasn’t going to humor him any longer. Maeve turned around,

walking in the opposite direction of the line. She fought through the crowd, ignoring the clown’s lauding shouts to come back and tell him the contents of Death’s 999-question survey.

With every step through the swirling fog, Maeve’s mind replayed the questions she had answered so carefully. All 999 of them.

\* \* \*

Maeve grabbed on to the railing of the bridge as the fog thickened again. She was now at the far end of the line, where souls lingered but never remained. She was light years, it felt now, from Death’s gates. It may not have been the wisest of decisions to make, but she couldn’t bear to be skin to skin, soul to soul, in that line again. Gray swirls of fog ebbed around Maeve, and when she looked out into the distance, the shoreline came into view.

Maeve let out a cynical laugh. Perhaps the Council, the Limbus Conclave, had granted her wish in this gray afterlife. She got her view of the beach, after all. Maeve looked down below at the jutting rocks and seafoam and tiny crabs climbing over barnacled wood. She scanned the horizon, at the bleary hills ahead where fog thinned out into mist, and in the middle of the tumultuous sea was a tugboat fighting the tide.

Her gaze darted back to the shore where now she could see it. Now that the fog had thinned: two small boats being dragged to the shore. Three, or perhaps, four figures in yellow raincoats and boots hoisted the boats to land, the chilling waves sweeping across the sand like a shark’s gaping mouth preying on the shoreline.

She looked back to the neverending line, souls packed in like sardines, and then back to the shore. She walked down the bridge, one step in the opposite direction of Death’s gates turning into two. Maeve’s pace quickened when eventually she found herself at the bottom of the bridge’s stairs where fog enveloped her line of sight. The waves roared as she staggered with every step, her legs fighting against combative winds. Maeve hugged her arms and propelled herself forward with a gaping breath, stumbling over seaweed and kelp washed ashore as sea plants tangling with her feet. Her nails dug into the sand before the wind could tear her away from land and into the turbulent sea.

Maeve steadied her legs and her gaze, eyes fixed on the hazy outline of the figures in raincoats and their tugboats fighting the tide.

Out of breath, Maeve broke for a run towards the hooded figures, nearly colliding into them. Their backs faced her, but Maeve could see their callused hands, working meticulously with nimble fingers to tie their boats to the dock.

“Hey!” She yelled over the wind. The figures turned toward Maeve, a moment that Maeve was unprepared for. “Who are you?” she asked, her voice small and nearly consumed by the whistling howls of the wind.

“We’re the rescue team,” said a woman with bright orange hair, her voice husky and rough like the crashing waves.

The woman glanced at Maeve briefly before her eyes

returned to the rope she was knotting. “What’s your name?” Maeve blinked. It was such an absurdly normal question. “Maeve,” she finally responded, though her thoughts were now consumed by what these hooded figures could possibly be rescuing.

The woman nodded, acknowledging Maeve’s presence in full when she finished knotting her rope. “I’m Brielle. Give us a hand, won’t you?”

Brielle threw the rope tethered to the other tugboat to Maeve. Maeve caught it, the weight of the wet rope awakening her senses. She stepped onto the dock and got to work.

“You see that fog hugging the bay, Maeve?” asked Brielle, coming over to help Maeve with knotting the rope.

“It’s everywhere,” said Maeve, peering down the shore and back to the bridge. “I’d be blind to miss it.”

“Well, our fears are in that fog, and in that fog is many a lost soul. But below in the very depths of the sea is something far, far worse.”

“Like sirens?” Maeve blurted out. Sirens below the bridge of Death’s gates would make sense. At least it did to Maeve.

“Why do you think sirens lure sailors to sea?” Brielle posed.

“Perhaps for sport? For the kill? For love? For world peace? I don’t know.”

“Good guesses, Maeve.” Brielle said with a wink.

“Well, aren’t you going to tell me what’s down below in the depths of the ocean?”

Brielle gave Maeve’s knot one final tug before her glacial eyes darkened. “You’ll find out.”

Maeve looked to the ocean, immediately regretting it the longer she stared into the waters as dark as night. Maeve wanted to ask Brielle more questions, but when Maeve looked over her shoulder, she was gone.

“Don’t mind, Brielle,” said a high-pitched voice that made Maeve jump. She steadied herself before she could fall over the dock. She peered behind her at a man with eyes as dark as the stormy seas. “Sirens are lonely creatures but they’re farther out at sea. All we have here close to the shore are the creatures of the bay.”

“Creatures of the bay?” asked Maeve, using her hands and feet to shuffle away from the dock’s edge.

“Below the bridge. In the fog. The creatures of the bay. Sirens feed off one’s desires. But the creatures of the bay are a different sort. They feed off one’s fears. That’s why we’re here,” he said, sending Maeve a thoughtful glance. A life buoy dangled from his arms. He slung it over his back, then extended an arm for Maeve to grab. “You’ve come down here from that line leading to Death’s gates. Tell me, miss, why are you here on the shore? Are you here to save a life?”

Maeve sat there stunned, then shook her head. She looked to the fog, to the bridge, to the bay. She had not come down here to the shore to be anyone’s savior. How could she, if she couldn’t even save herself? Maeve took the stranger’s hand, noticing a faded tag on his jacket with his name, Haven. She pulled herself up then thanked him.

She looked around at the emerging figures on the shore. “There are so many of you.”

“Indeed, there’s a handful of us out here.” Haven nodded his head in the direction of the bridge. “When you are on the bridge, you only see the dead. When my crew and I go out in the eye of the storm, we see something else underneath the bridge. The fog parts, and that’s when we see them. The living. Those at the cusp of life and death. We do what we can.” He paused for a moment, his breath swirling with each tendril of fog that lingered in the air, his gaze fixed on the bridge. “We do what we can to convince the living to turn back, but it’s a risky job.”

“Then why do you do it?” asked Maeve.

“Maybe we’re trying to make up for what we didn’t do in our old lives,” said a familiar voice from behind. Maeve turned around to see Brielle again. Brielle looked off to the distance, at the waves that lapped the shore.

“It’s no rewarding job,” said Brielle. “We’ve buried so many dead souls on the shore. Thousands more are lost at sea...” Brielle’s eyes hardened. “We’re not the only ones out there. Those at the top of the bridge: they either see us, or they see them. Those who make their plunge, we get ‘em before the creatures can. Whatever their reasons were for forgoing life, everyone deserves a burial, even in the sand.”

Maeve’s mouth parted, incredulous to Brielle’s crew. They rescued the living and the dead?

“Are you in?” asked Haven, collecting more buoys from the boats.

The wind picked up, stirring the waves, and Maeve shielded her eyes from the augmenting wind. “I haven’t agreed to anything.”

“You haven’t, but you’ve also walked out of the line from the bridge to come to shore. You wouldn’t be here if you weren’t searching for something more.” Brielle pointed to a slab of stone that separated the beach from the looming fog beyond it. Maeve’s eyes narrowed on the tally marks. She didn’t count them all, but it was clear these markings signified the passing of time. “That’s how long I’ve been part of the rescue team — the Cadre. I never went back to join the line to the Limbus Conclave.”

“Brielle!” Another hooded man shouted over the waves as he and the crew pulled a new boat to shore. “This one made it! The creatures almost took him, but we got to him before the sea could. Someone must’ve climbed up the bridge when we left our post.”

Brielle waved at the man in acknowledgment then turned to Maeve. “I’m heading out to sea. You can either stay in line or be of some help. You’re not going anywhere for the next five hundred years anyway.”

“You’ve been on this shore for five hundred years?” Maeve asked. Had she been in line for that long the last time she met with the Limbus Conclave, before she had been sent back to the end of the line?

Brielle shook her head. “I’ve been out here longer. I’ve kept track of how long it takes each soul on the bridge to make it to the front of the gate. It takes five hundred years, sometimes more, sometimes less, depending on how many souls depart from the living world to the dead,” Brielle turned and knelt as the newly deceased soul sprawled out

f the boat. It coughed out the water and seaweed lodged in its lungs.

Brielle pushed the boat to sea and hopped into the vessel then raised her brows at Maeve as if extending an invitation. Maeve gave one final look at the line at the top of the bridge, then back at the Cadre going back to sea with their boats and lifelines and rope. Maeve didn't want to wait in lines anymore.

She jumped into the boat with Brielle, the waves carrying her away from the shore and into the gurgling maelstrom.

\* \* \*

### *Five Hundred Years Later*

Maeve developed an eye for spotting movement whenever the living climbed up the bridge. She knew that waiting for high tide was how she'd get to the bridge at a faster rate. Despite Brielle's warnings to stick in pairs if she were going out to sea when the fog was too thick, Maeve went alone. She had never imagined she'd be part of the Cadre for this long, but here she was, pushing her boat from the shore in the middle of high tide. There were natural perils that accompanied the tide, but the water was the very least of dangers. Maeve would wait. For tonight the moon hung low, shining brightly in the eternal darkened sky as it kissed the sea's fog-draped horizon. The calm before the storm.

Maeve gave one final push to her boat and hopped in and rowed. Her forearms flexed as she pulled oars through the water in steady strokes. The waves carried her deeper into the sea until the shoreline was swallowed whole. Then the fog thinned, the sea rocking her gently in place beneath the bridge.

Here below in the water, the bridge of the dead that Maeve was so accustomed to transformed into the bridge of the living. There were some nights when there was no movement on the bridge. All that could be heard was the occasional rumble of cars or the buzzing of the bridgelights. Maeve couldn't see cars, or what she presumed to be the trudging feet of pedestrians or bicyclists whisking by. Rarely did Maeve find a soul from this vantage point below. But Maeve wasn't underneath the bridge to fish for souls.

Maeve lingered under the bridge, letting the peace of living waters wash over her. Being so close to the living, Maeve felt she herself was alive. Her eyes drooped despite having no need for sleep. When she heard sudden movement above, her eyes shot open.

Maeve stilled when she saw him. A soul wandering upon the bridge. His tousled hair blew erratically as he teetered back and forth. Despite the waters being calm from where she lay in her boat, a violent wind prodded his knees to buckle beneath him. There was a wildness in his gaze, and she froze, whatever protocol she learned from the Cadre out the window when his eyes searched hers. It was now or never. She had to latch onto the connection before the tide ebbed.

"Hello," Maeve greeted the man, her voice level and measured. The last thing Maeve wanted to do was frighten him from losing his footing and falling into the chilled waters of the bay.

"You can't save me—" the man yelled out to her.

"I'm not here to save you," Maeve replied.

"Then what are you doing down there in the water all alone?"

"I can ask you a similar question. What are you doing up there at the edge of a bridge all alone?"

"I'm going to do it. You can't stop me. I'm going to—" The man paced back and forth, wringing his hair with his hands.

"Is it worth it?" Maeve said in a low gentle murmur.

The man stared at Maeve incredulously.

"I don't remember much about the time when I was alive," Maeve continued. "But I think I spent most of my life waiting for death instead of living. To think that even now in Death's waters, I'm still waiting. It never ends."

Maeve didn't have a chance to hear the man's response, for the water below her trembled as she spoke. The calmness of the water transforming before her eyes. Maeve gripped the boat's sides, witnessing a whirlpool form in open water. She paddled with all her might, but it was to little avail. Brielle had warned her. Maeve braced herself and held her breath. The boat capsized, and Maeve clenched her teeth as her body collided into glacial water. She strained to keep her body afloat, her arms and legs numbed by the bone-chilling water. Roguish waves swept over Maeve, plunging her deeper into the depths of the bay.

She opened her eyes in the water, immediately closing them at the sight of swirling ink. But she couldn't unsee it, she couldn't unfeel it as the swirling ink thickened, grabbing hold of her limbs in a deadlock. The ink pried her eyes open and Maeve fought in vain to scream. Spiraling tentacles multiplied as if she were witnessing the spawning of snakes from the very source of the whirlpool. Here underneath the storm, she was in the clutches of no earthly sea. Here she was in the clutches of the creatures of the bay.

"Maeve..." they called her name as if they were sirens beckoning her to her death. Their snake-like tentacles wrapped around her body, each faceted with beaded eyes that glowed like moonstone. Maeve couldn't breathe, but she remembered Brielle's words:

*They feed off one's fears.*

Is that the reason why the creatures had not devoured her already?

Maeve only felt cold, devoid of feeling, frozen by the water, body and soul. She could let go right now...

A small jolting memory, vague and fading, stirred Maeve's unfeeling nerves and frozen bones. The shore. The Cadre. Brielle. Haven. In the distance she swore she could hear them calling her name. She supposed this was the end then. It was too late for Maeve now. In the clutches of the creatures of the bay, she would never be found and rescued by her friends. She would never be buried beneath the sand. The creatures of the bay had found her.

*They feed off one's fears.* Maeve's head lolled back as she closed her eyes. But then the tentacles constricted her body in a strangulating hold. Maeve snapped awake, the tentacles biting into her limbs now. She screamed, the coldness in her bones morphing into pain. Morphing into — Maeve gasped, for now she felt it. She saw it. The numerous eyes on every

entacle. The eyes. Her body felt like it was being snapped in half, but she forced herself to feel it. The fear consuming every limb and nerve. She stared at the thrashing tentacles glistening like moonstone. Maeve stared into eyes, eyes that were her own.

The tentacles tightened over her throat, but she made one final plea. As the ink-stained waters flooded her lungs, she spoke to the sea.

“I want to live.”

A bright light pierced Maeve’s eyes through the stormy sea and the tentacles released her. Legs and arms free, Maeve lunged forward. Maeve swam toward the light.

The deluge of the waves pulled Maeve back, and then her body landed with a thump on wooden planks.

Maeve opened her eyes, no longer seeing the endless night sea but cables of suspended red steel.

Calluses ruptured from where Maeve’s hands bled. Her fingers gripped the edges of the bridge. Maeve clenched her teeth as pulled herself up and fell back on the pedestrian walk. She lay there on the wooden planks of the bridge, remembering one life and five hundred years.

## Everything In Its Rightful Place

*By Lord Ord*

A curious mind has been pondering the world at large. A world which is not quite so large after all. A world in which, at the most basic level, almost everyone requires and craves the same amount of arbitrarium. We all are born, we breathe, we eat, we sleep, we suffer, we achieve, and we die. We desire love, friendship, community, belonging, freedom. So what separates us? Our dreams. Our goals. Our choices. Our struggles. Our accomplishments. And we can never truly know or understand anyone but ourselves. There is much beauty in that. There is also much sorrow. It is up to you to decide which thought process or belief you follow. And there remains the ever present ability to change whatever you may subscribe to.

The “right path”, however individualized and arguably arbitrary it may be, is one that I hope you choose to follow. For yourself primarily. For others as well. For your surroundings cannot truly be enjoyed or uplifted until you allow yourself to feel the most uniquely happy and confident that you possibly can be.

In today’s world, specifically the location and general culture in which we live, these practices are instilled in us to feel irrelevant. Perhaps more than ever before. Our motivations skewed. The pursuit of happiness is taught to feel secondary to work and financial or material gain. To consume more than to create. But is that the answer? For some, yes, and that is completely alright. For most, probably not. So, the appropriate question remains: are you happy? If the answer is no, then the solution would be to consider how to turn that around. Everlasting happiness, you may find, can be as simple as a change in perspective, or as complex as turning a pocket

watch into a packet of hot sauce. It is never too late to become the person you strive to be. Who you deserve to be.

To those who carry undeserved or uninterrupted hatred for another, whether it be a person or something else entirely, ask yourself why. Let go of all that may hold you back. Free yourself from the shackles of any- and everything designed to impair you. Transform into that which is beautiful. Or don’t.

As I write this all from a bus, multiple buses even, stops pass with time. People come and go. And I find my mind wondering when the opportunity may arise to show myself who I am meant to be. One thought lingers: everything is in its rightful place... right?

## Mouse Trap

*By Tess Kontarinis*

All she ever wanted to do was run. Use her legs to gallop through the field of uncut grass. Graze her fingers through the blades of green, old laughter. Photographs forgotten and molded in old picture books, soon to be rediscovered as her brother cleans the kitchen. She’s forgotten her father’s voice. It lives in video. The one where she’s so small, she has to run from side to side to see the full skeleton of a hippo. A nickname that was given to her in song. It was on her first day that celebrated her, she ran. With no real past, she ran with zero doubts. The blonde braids, jostled with her dance. And backyards filled with wondering and wandering. The same wondering as she glances to her right and sees her rock, shaped perfectly for keeping. What is this search for self? Didn’t it come naturally? Or was she led here by an alignment of light.

The sun of Hampton Beach. The pink dress flutters with her pedaling. And the bare feet are placed ever so gently. She didn’t know then, but this was it. The feeling she’d search for, for the rest of her life. Content. There was no grieving, no choicelessness, no entities yanking her off her path. Her future awaited, but her present was fulfilled. Even when her big toe scraped the black pavement. What else could she compare it to? Pain was only felt when she fell out of a parked car window because she was so impatient. Or when she hung on the monkey bars for too long and felt her elbow pop out of place. She’s grateful to remember all of this, all of it, the pain of others too. When her father would ask the same questions over and over, she responded with assurance. And her nightmares of the shadows lurking deep in the open closet of her room, couldn’t compare to the fear of losing the light from her eyes. Whether it be hers, or her mother’s. A different light, not like the one that would shock her nose when she got too close to her old TV. Or the burning of orange flames on her face, she drinks around the legs of talkative men. She’d look up to the sky, look at that alignment of light, and pray. Like the mouse did, when the trap snapped shut within the walls of her room.

# Coin Flipping

By Giovanni Safarella

One day I was unexpectedly arrested by a stern man in plain clothing while eating at a restaurant.

*"We need you to come with us—"* He said to me, flaunting a badge of significant authority, grappling onto my arm as I rose from my seated position. I took a deep breath.

*"Flick!"* I watched the coin fly up from my fingers into the air and return back down with a message from that God whom Homer called: fate. *And so the decision had been made.* I kicked the man's foot in one direction while simultaneously pushing him in the other with my hands. He successfully collapsed onto the ground and I ran away to the back of the restaurant, hoping to escape.

I immediately found a window and jumped through it with the force of my whole body, shattering it and finally landing collapsed into a puddle of broken glass and kitchen refuse.

My hands became cut as I lifted myself off of the ground. I ran as fast as I could until I eventually came to a fork in an alleyway—I flipped the coin, again, and again, and again.

Three weeks later, I found myself living alone, in a cabin without electricity in the middle of no-where. I remained there for two years, and the winters were brutal. At first, I quite enjoyed the reservation from the rest of the world—that oblique idleness which the animals seem to adopt so well; but it quickly became monotonous and boring.

A person came to the cabin one day. It was another man, and he was bigger than me, with large bones and a grueling face. He showed up out of the blue; a stranger in a winter storm.

*"May I stay with ye til' the storm pass?"* He said to me. I flipped the coin.

*"Are you dangerous?"* I asked him.

*"Yes."* He said. I flipped the coin.

*"Are you going to kill me?"*

*"No."* He said. I prepared us some dinner. We talked for a while and afterward shared a few drinks.

*"I will kill him when he goes to sleep."* I said to myself.

Night quickly came, and he, exhausted and feeling safe in my company, fell soundly asleep. I flipped the coin and then picked up my rifle from where I had placed it, and, aiming it to his chest, pulled the trigger.

But it did not shoot. As a matter of fact, it was jammed, and I would have had to take the whole thing apart to relieve the situation. I pulled the trigger a second time, to see if perhaps that would have done the trick—but it did not.

*"Click!"—"Click!"*—His eyes opened alertly and, grabbing the rifle away from me with one hand, quickly secured it, before hitting me in the head with (ironically) the headstock. I was knocked out coldly.

I awoke some time later, tied to a chair, and the chair tied to a post protruding from the wall, the stranger's lambent eyes staring directly into mine from about a foot away.

*"Ya little bastard!"* He said.

*"Ya lucky I ain't crazy...now, im gotta keep ye like this 'til the storm pass and be on my way—"*

We spoke at length and as it turned out, were sort-of similar. He played the guitar well.

The storm ceased the following day, and he left me with a pat on the shoulder and some words.

*"Ain't fate interestin?"* He said, pensively, and walked away forever. I never got his name, but what I knew for sure was that I needed a new gun.

# WHAT'S HAPPENING?

*Local Things - Compiled by Jackie Beck*

## Important Dates

**June 5** Jay Lucida 9pm to perform at Firstlive

**June 6** Abby Mako Oh Vinnie to rock out at Pianos, **June 23** Pete's candy store

**June 7** Andrea-Sofía Mosquera Beltrán to play at Club Groove NYC doors at 6pm show at 7pm, **June 12th** Queer Jam at Modega 9:30pm, **June 14th** 3rd ctr kids RSVP via instagram for address, **June 20th** 13-02 44th ave in LIC Soul Resonance event, Rubulad Midsommar **June 21**, **June 23** harmonies with Abby Mako project Oh Vinnie at Pete's Candy Store

**June 8** Anjoli Simone to play at Arlene's Grocery

**June 12** Friendly Company, Doak and the Yonderoos play at Desert 5 spot

**June 13** Fawnridge is set release their very first single "Hopelessly hopeful" & to play alongside Nihil Admirari, Electron Gun, Part Time Trauma at The Gutter Williamsburg 6PM

**June 15** Zoë Pete Ford to rock out at Pete's Candy Store 10:30 pm, **June 29** Good For Pub 4-7PM. **June 30** Another Country 8pm

**June 20** Batterhead single release show for "I'm not Weak" on all streaming platforms happening at Unruly Collective at 11pm

**June 21** Jimmy Climbs 12 pm "Room Full of Sky" stage afternoon Porch Stomp Folk Fest

**June 21 sunset Midsommar at Rubulad** 8pm on Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year Midsommar is set to gather artists for an insane lineup honoring the power of nature through dance, song and art. Sunset show starts with readings by Laura Gulbranson, Ravn **musical performances by RTS Neutral, Carter and Joe, The Legs, Andrea-Sofía Mosquera Beltrán, C. E. Foster, Jimmy Climbs**

**July 3** Friendly Company and The Legs to play at Our Wicked Lady

**July 19** Sam Obrist to play Berlin

**July 20th** Fabio's Woody Guthrie event Cafe Wha to include lots of great folk musicians

## The happs

C.E. Foster forms New York City Band, **Foster and the People** for **Midsommar at Rubulad**  
**June 21**

Andrea-Sofía Mosquera Beltrán to host a workshop on Vocal Liberation for Gay Garden Galore for pride **RSVP on @gaygardengalore**

Jimmy Climbs is currently **crowd funding** for **his album**. Fundraising will close **June 23** ..... What **Jimbo** shared:

*Jimmy Climbs has launched a crowdfunding campaign for his 3rd studio album, titled "3," an album he says focuses on ones connection with their inner child, as well as his experience since moving to NYC for the first time. The crowdfunding campaign will help fund the physical distribution of the album (ie Vinyls, CDs) as well the related studio production costs and marketing. It's set to close June 23rd.*

**Batterhead** "I'm not weak" single release **June 20**

Washington Square park fountain has been filled, so grab your bikinis and swimming trunks, your coins for wishing and take a dip

When entering the Park from MacDougal street just before you reach the fountain your feet will be met with a carpet of pink orchid like flowers. These are the droppings of the massive Northern Catalpa tree which blooms in late spring and sheds its flowers into early summer. Sit at the benches under her. It's grounding to watch her let her darlings go.